

GOOD DAY MATES!

My name is Cate, and I will give you a quick description of the beautiful country of New Zealand – my home and birthplace! If you have no idea where New Zealand is or what it looks like, my country is made up of two main islands (North and South Island), which are separated by the Cook Strait. A smaller island, Stewart Island, is located off



New Zealand is made up of two islands located southeast of Australia.

the southern coast of South Island. Many other smaller islands are in the area as well. We are in the South Pacific Ocean right next to Australia, which I'm sure you're all familiar with. The only landmass south of us is Antarctica!

Let me tell you about my family first. Our home is in the coastal city of New Plymouth. Our town is of modest size; there are close to 45,000 people here, and it is a very recreational city. Since we're right by the ocean and a huge snow-capped mountain called Mount Taranaki (also called Mount Egmont), people can

surf, water ski, and snowboard all in the same day!

I'm sure you're anxious to hear about the geology of our country. We have a ton of volcanic activity here, more than any other country in the world. We have over 400 volcanoes that have been active in the past 10,000 years. That is four times as many volcanoes as any other country. Mount Taranaki, a 2,440m (8,000 ft) volcano located an hour away from my home, is one of them. Mount Taranaki is a young volcano that is now dormant—it hasn't had any activity in 250 years.

Some of the other more famous volcanoes on North Island are Mount Ruapehu, an active volcano that is the tallest on North Island at about 3,000 m (10,000 ft). North Island is also home to the Taupo volcanic zone, a row of volcanoes that stretches southward from White Island. Mount Ruapehu is at the southern tip of this zone. Small eruptions occur in this zone all the time. In fact, when I was visiting some relatives up in that area in 1996, Mount Ruapehu erupted. New Zealand's most powerful



Mount Ruapehu during the 1996 eruption.  
<http://www.nzholidayservices.co.nz/ruapehu.html>

explosion also happened in this zone, when Mount Tarawera exploded in 1886 in a blast that was thirty times more powerful than the Mount St. Helens blast that is famous in the United States! In this explosion, a series of small earthquakes was followed by a gigantic earthquake. Eventually, all three of Mount Tarawera's peaks erupted, sending ash and smoke thousands of meters into the air. The blast was so loud that many in New Zealand and in the capital city of Auckland (also on North Island) thought that our country was being invaded by Russian warships!



This is a view of the Southern Alps from a plane.

<http://www.gonomad.com/transport/0306/nztransport.html>

South Island is by far the more mountainous island. If you were to fly over the island, you'd notice that the island is divided down its length by a mountain range called the Southern Alps. The tallest peak in this range is also the tallest peak in the entire country – Mount Cook, which is in the center of South Island. My aunt works as an environmental scientist for Mount Cook National Park. If you ever decided to visit, she and her team could show us around the 3,750-m (12,300 ft) tall mountain. It is a very popular tourist attraction as well as a common mountain climbing challenge. Mount Cook has two large glaciers occupying its slopes, called the Tasman and Hooker Glaciers. These glaciers can be up to 27 km long and over 3 km wide!

There's also something exciting to witness when we get to the Southern Alps. My cousin runs a commercial gliding site up in the mountains. Since the Southern Alps are perpendicular to some strong winds, people can go gliding above the peaks!

One point of great interest is a couple of wilderness preserves. New Zealand is home to many different kinds of endangered species. Due to a lack of predatory animals, oversized and relatively primitive species have been able to survive here. A prime example of this is the kakapo, a nocturnal parrot that can't even fly! We're also home to flesh-eating snails and the only reptile survivor from the dinosaur age – the Tuatara. But if you're looking for native land mammals, the only ones you'll see in our country will be bats. All the other mammals you will see, like sheep, are from somewhere else in the world.

I hope you can visit one day. New Zealand is one of the most picturesque countries in the world, known for its unspoiled landscapes and clean environment. We also have a unique culture, and if you like sports, try to watch a game of Aussie Rules football on television. It's not exactly like the kind of football you have back in the United States, but it's just as fun. So let me know if you ever decide to visit!

Sincerely,  
Cate Philips  
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